

Ajanta Caves

Location - Ajanta Caves are located on the Waghora River near Aurangabad in Maharashtra.

It is a series of rock caves in the Sahyadri ranges (Western Ghats).

Associated sect — Buddhism

Architecture- Constructed in the shape of a horseshoe (semicircular).

Number of Caves: There are a total of 30 caves (all Buddhist). Among them, 25 are Viharas (residential places) for monks, while 5 are Chaityas (prayer halls). 29 caves are fully built, while 1 cave is uncompleted. Cave number 9 and 10 belong to the Satavahana period, while cave number 16, 17, 19 belong to the Gupta period.

Time Period of Development- These caves were constructed between 200 BC and 650 AD.

The Ajanta caves were engraved by Buddhist monks under the patronage of the Vakataka rulers.



Themes of paintings found here are description of Buddha's life, Bodhisattvas and Jataka stories.

UNESCO Heritage Site: The Ajanta Caves were designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983.

Special feature - The Ajanta painting is known for its unique painting style in which pictures are not divided into different parts. The 9th and 10th caves are the oldest caves and the 17th cave has the highest number of paintings.



Fresco mural painting technique - It is executed on freshly laid or wet lime plaster. The colours, which are made by grinding dry-powder pigments in pure water, are water-based pigments. Colours are dried and set with the plaster to become a permanent part of the wall. Yellow clay was used for yellow color, ocher for red, ceramic, gypsum or lime for white, carbon ashes for black, lapis lazuli for blue and gluconite stone for green colour.

Presently these caves are being conserved and maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The paintings done in the Ajanta caves are influenced by the painting styles of Tibet and Sri Lanka.

Ajanta Cave Paintings

Various dynasties have contributed in its development, such as Satavahana dynasty, Vakataka dynasty, Gupta dynasty and Chalukya dynasty.

Some unique paintings have been made in cave number 16. An important picture is of a dying princess, in which a princess is dying due to painful separation from her husband while her family members are standing around her. This picture has a unique depiction of human compassion.

Cave No. 17 is given the name of Chitrashala because many beautiful paintings have been engraved in it. A wonderful picture is depicting the relationship between Buddha and his wife Yashodhara. Yashodhara is shown offering her son Rahul to Mahatma Buddha. Here also a very vivid depiction of sentiment can be observed.

The profound influence of Buddhism can be seen on the Ajanta paintings. Lord Buddha and Bodhisattvas have been depicted in these paintings. In fact, Ajanta painting adopts classical standard and it leaves a deep imprint on Indian painting for the ages to come.



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